

Nimuendajá: The Eastern Timbira

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241 and rice. An Indian who takes no precautions against these birds is sure to lose his entire yield, irrespective of the amount planted. The only antidote is to have a guardian stationed in the plots throughout the daytime during the season so that he may at once repel the intruders. This is achieved by shouts or a variety of missiles—stones, palm nuts, and clay balls hurled with the hand, with slings ([41]) (hūkaipē'rēa), or with a pellet bow.

223 Among the Rāmkō'kamekra and Krahō' I have seen boys setting snares for parrots. To a hoop about 20 cm. in diameter and spanned by a network of cords they attach a dozen nooses of tucum fiber (Rāmkō'kamekra) or, among the Krahō', of horsehair. After placing some rice ears or similar lures below these snares, they tie the hoop in horizontal position to a wooden fork, which in turn is fastened to the top of as long a bamboo pole as possible. The entire contraption, which is visible from a considerable distance, is erected in the plantation, and as soon as the parrots pounce upon the rice ears their feet are caught in the nooses (pl. 17, a, b).

252 White neighbors are wont to mock at Rāmkō'kamekra farmers, alleging that 177 they raise nothing or at least nothing worth while and that they subsist by theft and begging. Few take the trouble even to look at the Indian plantations. Yet toward the close of 1930 these scoffers were obliged willy-nilly to acknowledge publicly that the Indians had planted considerable crops. At that time part of

Fig. 5. Digging stick. $\frac{3}{10}$ nat. size.

Maranhão suffered from a famine, for the manioc crop had failed over a wide area so that the generally indispensable flour made from this plant was lacking. In Barra do Corda the scarcity forced the local officials to ration the sale of what little was to be had. At the peak of this plight the Rāmkō'kamekra suddenly appeared with several horseloads of manioc flour and saved the townsmen since by an odd chance they alone had saved their yield. In the meantime, not only the half-starved Guajajara from beyond the Rio Corda had billeted themselves on the residents of Ponto, but even the Neobrazilians came to offer the Rāmkō'kamekra their labor in return for manioc. When I reached Barra do Corda in 1931 and inquired in a shop whether good flour was to be had, the owner answered, "Very good flour, indeed; it's from the aldeia Ponto!" Yet in this town many "whites" had declared categorically that they would never eat anything prepared by "these nauseating beasts" (*esses bichos nojentos*). Many Indians are deterred from ampler production of manioc flour for sale only by the lack of means of transport, for hauling a flour sack on one's back over a distance of seventy-eight kilometers is something of a hardship even for a Timbira educated as a log racer.

252 Rāmkō'kamekra economic life was most significantly affected during the last 433 twenty years by the Indians' turning to intensive preparation of manioc flour and 483 to rice cultivation. At present these originally alien articles of food are about to 177 gain ascendancy both in the kitchen and, next to basketwork, in trade. Agriculturally the Rāmkō'kamekra have advanced farther since their contact with civilization than the Guajajara, whose aboriginal farming was anciently far more intensive, but whose productivity has since rather diminished than grown.

241 Even today the Indians in part use their aboriginal planting stick, which is 412 invariably of very hard wood, either pau roxo or pau candeia, 75-100 cm. in length, round and flattened spade-fashion at the butt (fig. 5). Sometimes this flattened

- 224 killed, but sought only for lack of all other game. Because of its reputed destruction
[23] of snakes the people like to keep it tame in the village. Though I have never observed
these birds at this, a tame specimen once gave me a demonstration of its procedure
when mistaking my leather belt, which had accidentally dropped, for a snake.
Furiously pouncing on the strap, the sariema seized the buckle with its bill, swung
it in the air, and lashed it two or three times against the ground in a manner that
would inevitably have cracked a snake's spine. Only then did the attacker recognize
its error and let the belt alone. Falcons are killed in large numbers when the steppe
grass is burnt in June and these birds immediately foregather in order to hunt the
startled grasshoppers, lizards, and other small species. Falcons are sought both for
their flesh and their downy feathers, which play a great part in Eastern Timbira
ceremonial.
- 224 Snakes are killed with any handy stick, except that a *sneurijú*, which has the
thickness of a human thigh, requires a sizable club.
- 483 Game of agouti size, or larger, is carried home in a palm-leaf basket plaited
ad hoc. First the hunter plaits the back of the container, deposits the animal on it,
and then interlaces the leaflets over it. The tip of a monkey's tail is pulled through
its lower jaw and the game is then hung over's one shoulder. A man will tie together
a deer's feet, put his head through the ring thus formed, and carry his kill home
on his back.
- 462 The *Ramkô'kamekra*, too, as noted by Snethlage,² drags large game no farther
than the village boundary, whence his wife carries it home.
- 224 In general the Timbira are still skillful at hunting, exhibiting marked ability to
581 interpret footprints and great perseverance in pursuing wounded animals. A good
hunter is prized all the more nowadays because lack of game renders the chase pro-
gressively less productive. He is a much coveted husband: I once overheard a *Ram-
kô'kamekra* reproving his infatuated niece as follows, "You want to marry him!
What sort of game has he ever shot?"
- 224 Collective hunting accompanies the festivals, especially the period preceding the
527 terminal celebration, which always requires a large quantity of meat pies. Since
561 this closing ceremony is determined by the council when the duration of the festival
is deemed sufficient, this decision likewise involves the signal for collective hunting.
This devolves exclusively on the festive societies and age classes that participated in
the festival. Each group is accompanied by the two associated girl auxiliaries, who
are sometimes joined by several female age mates, especially of the "wanton" class.
At least one man of more mature age invariably goes along in order to advise
the younger people and to see to the preservation of ceremonial rules. He has
the prerogative of eating the brains of animals killed, this diet being tabooed to the
young people. The oldest woman of the society—contrary to Snethlage's observa-
tion—does not dream of permitting herself to be loaded down with kitchen utensils
to be brought to the hunters' assembly. Old women calmly wait in the village for
[887] whatever food their sons or sons-in-law are morally obliged to bring them. I am
further puzzled by the function of the cords and ropes (both of tucum fiber) with
which, according to the same investigator, every hunter provides himself.
- 224 In the collective hunting trips, too, the *tamha'k* (p. 98) play a part, attempting
791 to increase the yield of the undertaking by first performing certain actions. Indeed,
they even tried to improve the quality of the slain game by their magical influence.
If animals were to be surrounded with the aid of firing, a *tamha'k* had to be the first
to light the fire. He and his fellows, however, did not take part in the ensuing drive.

² Meise Nieuw, 465.

1 [i.e. the sariema - - Analyst]